



Non-human Narratives in Lisa See's *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*

Qiping Liu

Associate Professor, School of English Studies; Researcher, Beijing Institute of Intercultural Communication (BIIC), Beijing International Studies University, Beijing 100024, China

liuqiping77@163.com

Funding information— This work was supported by the Youth Project of Beijing Social Sciences named “The Representation of Community in Contemporary Ethnic Women Literature from the Perspective of Material Turn” [Grant number 24WXC005]

Received: 17 May 2026; Received in revised form: 14 Jun 2026; Accepted: 19 Jun 2026; Available online: 23 Jun 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— Since the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, storytelling has become a major narrative device in Chinese American literature. While some critics emphasize the importance of storytelling in the articulation of identity and in the examination of acculturation and cultural dislocation, others question its limitations and unreliability which seem to be recognized by some Chinese American women writers, such as Lisa See. To supplement the limited knowledge of first-person narrators, See employs tea as narrative devices in *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*. In addition, this novel includes written texts that supplement first person narration. A new-materialist perspective reveals that non-human things narrate or act. When Lisa See endows non-human things with narrative power, they are no longer inert objects but storied matter. Drawing on new materialism, this paper will address how non-human narratives and written texts can compensate for the limits of human narrators and play active roles in shaping the text's narrative and aesthetic expressions.



Keywords— Tea, New materialisms, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*

I. STORYTELLING AND STORIED MATTER IN CHINESE AMERICAN LITERATURE

Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* underscores the Chinese tradition of the “talk-story” as a major trope in Chinese American women's narratives. Kingston's narrator positions herself as a young Chinese American girl who seeks her identity by telling stories about her father's sister, the no name woman, her mother, Brave Orchid's lifetime in China and in America, her aunt, Moon Orchid's life, as well

as by re-telling the tales of Mulan and Ts'ai Yen. Through the narrator's interweaving of these episodes, the Chinese tradition of “talk-story” becomes a main narrative device in negotiating the issue of identity. In retelling these stories of women's life in Old China and their life experiences in America, the characters are able to negotiate and articulate their identity. While some critics emphasize the importance of storytelling in the articulation of identity, others question its reliability and even charge that storytelling separates

Chinese American literature from the western canon. Dunick claims that “Throughout Amy Tan’s novels, talk-story promotes multiple levels of misunderstanding between both Chinese-speaking mothers and English-speaking daughters and between persons who speak different Chinese dialects” (5). She quotes Yuanyuan who: “... recognizes the limits of talk-story in Tan’s novels by arguing that they embody a distinct aspect of loss” (5). Depending solely on the narrators’ memories, these talk-stories “do not represent a stable text” but “often signal an erasure or loss of China as referent for the American-born listeners” (Dunick 5-6). Based on this factor, Dunick agrees with Yuan yuan’s assertion that readers should “... call attention to the inability of oral talk-story in Tan’s novels to establish and maintain an intergenerational cultural memory of China as a cultural homeland...” (6). Furthermore, Dunick illustrates that “talk-story cannot function properly for these Chinese mothers and American daughters without a source of mediation” (8). I agree with Dunick and Yuan yuan that Tan indeed realizes the limitations and unreliability of “talk-story” narration since the oral narrators in her first three novels are usually Chinese mothers who hold the limited knowledge of first-person narrators and narrate depending on their unreliable memories. To supplement the limited knowledge of first-person narrators, Tan also creates other-than-human narrators, such as storied food in *The Kitchen God’s wife*, narrative bones and written texts in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*.

Like Amy Tan, besides employing the device of storytelling, Lisa See also explores the mother-daughter relation and the question of identity through non-human narrators and some written texts. In her bestselling *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, See explores sisterhood through nushu, a traditional Chinese female writing, and the medium of a fan. Likewise, in her latest novel, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*, along with storytelling, tea and some written texts play crucial roles in characterization and plot structure. In a new-materialist perspective, besides humans, non-human things are able to narrate. Under the influence of the non-human turn, Chinese scholar Shang Biwu focuses on “non-human narratives” to eliminate the “anthropocentrism” of narrative studies. He defines non-human narratives as “(...) the organization of events

involving non-human entities into a text,” identifying “four main types: narratives of natural objects, narratives of supernatural objects, narratives of artificial objects, and narratives of artificial humans” (Shang 158). Besides, he states that “In narrative works, the non-human entity at the level of both story and discourse usually plays the roles of narrator, character and focuser, thus performing three narrative functions, namely the narrative function, the action function and the observation function” (158). In Shang’s view, as narrators, non-humans can narrate both humans’ and their own stories. And under the guidance of Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory, non-human narrators could be regarded as “(...) actors and not simply the hapless bearers of symbolic projection” (Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 10). As actors, non-humans have active agency and they interact with humans in a network. Drawing on the theories of Lucretius, Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Bruno Latour, political theorist Jane Bennett has also acknowledged widespread agency in living beings and material phenomena. She advocates “thing-power/vibrant materialism” to “dissipate the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal, organic/inorganic” (Bennett x). In her view, things are no longer passive objects but “vibrant matter” with “thing power.” What’s more, to criticize the ontological binary of the subject and the object, both Latour and Bennett endow non-human things with agency or power and emphasize their interactions with human beings in a network or an assemblage. Approaching the question of things with the insights of quantum physics, Karen Barad theorizes the inseparable interconnection between humans and non-human nature as “intra-actions” as opposed to “inter-action that presumes the prior existence of separate entities” (151). She claims that matter as agency is “intra-active becoming that never sits still” and is “generative” due to “the ontological inseparability/ entanglement of intra-acting agencies” (139). Thus, in Barad’s view, matter is in a process of becoming and mutation, and as such it is constituted in intra-action. Last but not least, in their observation function non-humans serve as focalizers that can observe or examine humans’ behavior and formulate their own experiences. When both Amy Tan and Lisa See endow non-human things with the power of narration, they are no longer inert objects but storied matter. In their works,

non-human narrators supplement human narrators in the construction of the plot and play active roles in shaping the text's narrative and aesthetic expressions.

II. TEA AS A BOND LINKING MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS OVER GENERATIONS

By setting *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* mainly in China and depicting many things characteristic of that location, Lisa See expresses her enthusiasm for Chinese culture, though only one-eighth ancestry is Chinese. Like her bestselling *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, which sets the story of female friendship in a Chinese village, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* also centers on women's struggles and solidarity in ethnic Chinese culture. In this novel, See depicts an Akha girl, Liyan, and her family, who align their lives around the seasons and the farming of tea. Many book reviews point out the incredible power of tea in this novel. Emily Gray Tedrowe from *USA Today* remarks: "One of the fascinating elements of See's epic novel is the contrast between the isolated lives of the Akha and the globalized world of China's larger cities – a contrast bridged by tea". Besides bridging the gap between the remote areas and big cities in China, tea plays a crucial role in characterization and plot structure. Specifically, in addition to being a beverage, tea is vibrant matter which acts as a maternal bond, linking mothers and daughters across generations; a drinkable antique, incorporating Akha customs and Chinese tea culture; and a historical nexus merging female family lineage with the political and economic development of China. Finally, it is a medicinal tonic that not only combines different elements to allow body and mind to interact in beneficial ways but also illustrates the necessity of balancing economic development and environmental protection.

See's focus on non-human things in her works may be closely related to her experiences in the antique store of her father's family. She has many memories of those old items and expresses that, "it all fascinates me, the smell of old wood, the touch of objects, it's full of meaning to me. I am connected to my great-grandfather through these objects."ⁱ Since these old things become a nexus between See and her ancestors, it seems that they are not merely inert objects, but also "vibrant matter" or "agentic things" conjured up by new materialists. Drawing on new materialism and cultural

criticism on identity, I will investigate the agentic force of tea in the construction of characters' identity in *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*. Specifically, I will explore how the materiality of tea and discourse on it mutually articulate the issues of identity and the bonding of the female lineage across time and space.

The grove of old tea trees inherited by Liyan from her maternal line actively accompanies Liyan in her journey of self-discovery. The grove of mother tea trees and the things linked to it as well as the discourse on tea effect the shift of Liyan's identity from marginalized ethnic girl and helpless mother to self-reliant tea trader.

Growing up in a male-dominated society, Liyan is deemed to be worthless like her dowry, a primitive grove of old tea trees inherited from her mother. The grove is denigrated as a remote and cursed place before Liyan goes there. When taking Liyan to the grove for the first time, her mother recounts the close relation between it and her female lineage, pointing out the enormous value and divinity of old tea trees with their distinctive "yellow threads" that have medicinal power. To her mother, this grove is a sacred place that records her family lineage and provides precious gifts for curing people. Dissenting from her mother's view, Liyan is only able to "see not health and cures but superstition and traditions that hurt people" in this grove (See 47). Ignoring what her mother claims, Liyan remains convinced of the grove's worthlessness due to its remote and hidden location. When facing her so-called dowry, "a dozen of old tea trees" in the midst of which "stands a single tea tree" with nothing valuable apparent to her, Liyan listens to the voice in her mind, "the word that has been so much in my mind lately pounds against the inside of my skull. Worthless. Worthless. Worthless" (43). The old tea trees evoke a strong sense of identification (albeit negative) in Liyan's heart, as she compares her own prospects to this remote grove that seems to reflect her worthlessness as a daughter and a woman. She projects onto the trees the patriarchal perspective of women as mere objects of little value.

Liyan cannot realize the power and inherent worth of this grove of old tea trees until she delivers a baby girl under the protection of the mother tree. On learning that Liyan is pregnant with Sanpa's baby, her mother takes her to deliver secretly in the grove, since having a baby before marriage violates Akha tradition. Throughout the whole process of

the birth, the mother tree, sister trees and even the yellow threads reveal themselves as “vibrant matter” that has a deep intra-action with Li-yan’s body. The grove offers indispensable supportive thing power to facilitate Li-yan’s childbirth. First of all, the lofty geographical location of the old tea trees prompts Li-yan to undertake a climbing exercise before the delivery. This inevitably accelerates her labor process and makes it go smoothly. Li-yan seems to struggle physically due to her prenatal climb and reflects how, “if anything, our journey is speeding my labor” (95). When it comes to the labor process, Li-yan’s “circumstances are calamitous, but in the mother tree’s spreading branches” above her, she “sees a dome of protection” (96). She “grasps a low branch” when more power is needed, and her back “presses against the trunk as she pushes as hard as she can” (96). This description shows that the spreading branches of the old tea trees provide a natural shelter for Li-yan which gives her a strong sense of being protected physically and mentally. When she holds them tightly in her hands, the power of the branches flows into her body, allowing her to finish the labor. Providing an appropriate natural environment and a propitious sanitary condition, the old tea trees show their intrinsic natural force as agentic matter. Li-yan’s successful labor thus demonstrates the intra-connectivity between human and non-human bodies. Moreover, since they cannot take the placenta—“friend-living-with child”—back to the village and bury it under the ancestor shrine, the grove of old trees both accepts the evidence of childbirth and protects Li-yan’s new-born daughter. In addition, in response to A-ma’s order forbidding Li-yan from bringing any men to the old tea trees, the birth of a new daughter overturns the superstitious perception of the death of Li-yan’s grandfather. Li-yan discovers that, though ancient, the old tea trees are not cursed or unlucky for humans. Through numerous intimate “intra-actions” with these trees, Li-yan gives up her previous bias and misconceptions of them. Moved by their strong thing power, she rebuilds her trust in nature. By reinstating the materiality and power of both human and other bodies, the novel expresses the ecological insight that human beings are not outside nature. The Akha women and the trees are material entities sharing the same roots and origins in the land.

As a precious inheritance from her mother’s

generations, the grove can serve as a spiritual guide when Li-yan suffers another setback because of her marital failure and her husband’s death. Liyan becomes an outcast from her village after delivering her baby and surrendering her to the Menghai Social Welfare Institute. However, the sudden appearance of Sanpa and his proposal give her temporary hope. After their marriage, Sanpa takes Liyan to live at the border of Thailand whereupon Liyan finds that her husband has become a drug addict. To escape this desperate situation, Liyan runs into a forest while Sanpa chases her and is killed by a tiger. After the failure of her marriage and the death of her husband, and unsure if her family will accept her again, Li Yan chooses to return to her tea plantation. This time, the tea tree brings Li Yan a mother-like sense of security. “I seek the solitude of my grove and fell asleep under the grotto’s canopy, feeling the age and protection of the trees around me” (148). More than obtaining comfort and a sense of belonging, she finally draws the strength to begin a new journey, enlightened by her mother’s recounting of the Tea Horse Road history and the circumstances of the grove.

Before confiding her decision to send Liyan to a trade school, her mother recounts the history of their female ancestors and the life force they draw from the mother tree. Due to her mother’s storytelling, she understands the great obstacles her ancestors conquered to spread civilization through the trade of salt, matches, and so many other necessities. At the same time, Liyan comprehends the life force of the mother tree and its intimate alliance with her female ancestors. In her mother’s discourse, the mother tree is filled with life force as “the trunk and branches are still infested with various types of fungi, molds, orchids, and, of course, the yellow threads” (151). Transported by their nomadic ancestors, the mother tree assembles the life force of different elements that serve as medicine to heal the villagers:

All the life on the mother tree came from somewhere else. It was transported by our nomadic ancestors. You could say the tree shows the history of our female line... For generations, the nima and ruma of Spring Well and so many other villages have sought the help of the women in our family. We give them leaves, bark, and even the yellow parasite from the mother tree to use as medicine (151).

This maternal discourse not only expresses the power of

women in their family, but also points out the true value of the old tea trees—standing for a hundred years without falling, accepting and embracing setbacks and scars, and performing their thing power. Furthermore, Liyan's mother promises that her daughter is as "unique" as these old trees that are filled with life energy despite the intolerance and hardships they have undergone.

Drawing on her mother's narrative and the power of the grove, Liyan finds the strength to move forward. Before her journey to the outside world, she looks back at her grove; the mother tree is no longer worthless in her eyes, but full of agency empowering her as she claims:

"I try to absorb everything that I see with new eyes: the mother tree standing with such dignity, the sister trees offering their protective embrace, the camphor trees hiding them all, the ancient strength of the boulder, the cliff at the edge of the grove, the mountains in the distance" (152).

Personified as Liyan's female ancestor and her mother, this grove and things comprising it are able to endow Liyan with a new strength to begin a new life. Through the "intra-actions" between Li-yan and the old tea trees at different periods of her life, Li-yan absorbs different types of thing power and finally rids herself of the dilemmas that plagued her initially, so as to begin a new and self-reliant life in the outside world.

Inspired by the thing power of the tea trees, Li-yan moves beyond Nannuo Mountain to study tea systematically as a student. She achieves the transition to tea master after undergoing the process of exploring deeply the culture and philosophical significance of the Pu'er Tea produced by the wild old tea trees. Li-yan would not have become a tea master without her inherited talent for tea picking thanks to the holistic tea farming circumstances of her childhood, nor could she have become proficient without the systematic and scientific study of the tea culture. Most importantly, she would never have become a tea master without the unfortunate and trying experiences in her life, such as the failure of her first marriage and the loss of her daughter. In the first place, Li-yan is lucky to be recommended as a candidate to the Pu'er Tea College at Yunnan Agricultural University. Still as a novice in the tea art, Li-yan rediscovers the value of tea from her mother tree, and she learns a new word—*huigan*—"the returning flavor"

coming from its momentary bitterness. Reminded by Tea Master Sun, Li-yan realizes that she has not been home for eight years, during which time the flavor of the tea has also had enough time to develop. Taking the thought that Tea Master Sun states, "Man becomes wiser and more mature through life experience" (173), Li-yan tastes her tea with a new state of mind and discovers its unsuspected vibrant power—"the more I taste, the more captivated I become. The tea itself is physically seducing me" (174). This monologue by Li-yan serves as powerful evidence for the "thingness of things" that Bill Brown describes in his "Thing Theory". The power of the old tea leaves is conceptualized as *huigan*, which makes the "thingness" of tea become concrete. As an agentic thing the aged tea with *huigan* carries Li-yan's life memories. "Warmth washes up from my chest and flushes my face. What's happening to my body feels as potent as those early days when I first fell in love with San-pa" (174). In its bitterness and sweetness, there is a more than metaphorical "intra-connection" between the power of the tea and Li-yan's first love.

If the "*huigan*" discloses the thingness and the magic thing power of Pu'er tea for Li-yan, then a further systematic study of the knowledge and culture of tea helps Li-yan become a qualified tea master. In the twelve months after she discovers the profound significance of the old tea, she begins to learn the art and trade from Tea Master Sun. He "teaches me how to buy raw tea, store it, and let nature do its job of aging" (190). The most important point taught by this master is the natural aging of the tea, which not only shows the core value of Pu'er tea, but also demonstrates its agentic power. Holding the view that humans and other organic entities are equal partners, Li-yan treats the tea in a more comprehensive way in keeping with traditional Chinese philosophical thoughts. All of these insights allow her to become a tea master in a very short time.

In their interactions in the novel, the old tea trees, like Liyan, seem to have an existence of ups and downs. Initially, she thinks herself as worthless as her dowry. Then, as Liyan transitions from worthless tea girl to helpless mother to self-reliant tea master and tea trader, the old tea trees also change from apparently worthless entities to valued healers, from supposed fakes to precious commodities. The mutual transition of the old tea trees in the grove and the young woman who inherits them record Chinese tea culture,

witness the development of the tea industry, and shed light on the ecological crisis that Liyan's grove suffers caused by economic and scientific development.

III. NON-HUMAN NARRATIVES AND HALEY'S IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: FROM CONFUSION TO GLOBAL CITIZEN

In contrast to Liyan's storytelling, *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* uses a number of devices to tell her daughter Haley's story, including letters, a transcript of a therapy session, and homework assignments. Not until the final chapter, however, do we hear Haley's own narrative and see the world entirely from her point of view. This style of storytelling not only enriches our experience of the narrative, but also guides us to observe Haley's search for identity. The narrative combines different written texts to record Haley's transition from being an adopted child suffering from an identity crisis to a global citizen.

Raised in California by loving adoptive parents, Haley often wonders about her origins despite her privileged childhood. To let Haley maintain her connection to her Chinese background, the adoptive parents encourage her to keep in the bottom drawer of her dresser the tea cake had left with her baby on the steps of an orphanage. This cake prompts Haley's curiosity and puzzlement about her origin. Her adoptive mother's letter explicitly records the interaction between Haley and the tea cake, revealing that Haley has a strong degree of identity confusion during her sleeps with it and traces the characters and decorations on the wrapper with her finger: "There are V's like cartoon birds, those repeating lines like S's, another stroke that meanders uninterrupted all over the place, and that thing that looks like a fork drawn in the center" (162). Interacting with the characters and decorations on the wrapper of the tea cake, Haley thinks about its meaning and even imagines that her birth mother is sending her a message. Besides, Haley even draws the tea cake and confides to her classmates that "I am the first person in my family to come here. I came from China. I bought a tea cake with me" (161). Therefore, it can be said that this displaced thing—the tea cake—stored in the drawer in Haley's bedroom still gives full play to its narrative purpose, holding the key to the mystery of Haley's identity.

As the most precious gift passed down through Ama's

family line, the tea cake becomes both a crucial clue in Haley's search for her roots and a guide to her life's orientation. In juxtaposing some of the e-mails between Haley and Professor Ho with Haley's narration about her experiences in a tea expo, we can see how the discourse on tea guides Haley to begin her studies and to search for her origins.

In her e-mails with Professor Ho, Haley recounts how her adoptive family background along with the tea cake left by her birth mother are the main reasons why she is committed to studying tea. As her adoptive mother Constance is a biologist and famous in professional circles, the connection helps promote Haley's application to her chosen academic program when she mentions her name to her potential supervisor. What's more, Haley's adopted father Davis is an arborist, which coincides with Haley's interest. As Constance writes in her letter, "Haley tags along with Dad everywhere he goes. She's inherited his love of trees." All of these show that Haley's adopted parents' professions and the material condition they provide pave the way for Haley to conduct her academic research, and that they help on the journey to her roots. In Haley's research proposal, she mainly questions the impact of climate change on the sensory and medicinal attributes of tea. Based on her research questions, we can observe that Haley mainly studies tea from a scientific perspective. However, inspired by the reply from the supervisor, Haley changes her attention from noticing the physical traits and function of her tea cake to the possible philosophical meanings of tea. The question that the professor raises to Haley — "how do we reconcile the poetry and philosophy of tea with the practicalities of growing and processing the product" neatly illustrates the combination of nature and culture (329). To the professor, more than a research object, tea is an example of what Donna Haraway calls "natureculture," and it bears philosophical and practical significances. Fusing nature and culture, tea always actively engages with people, as the professor illustrates in relating the ancient beliefs about tea passed down by his immigrant parents "Every hour spent drinking tea is a distillation of all the tea hours that have ever been spent; and Truly you can find the universal through the particular tea. Personally, I see a real disconnect between a sentiment like Tea is the cup of humanity and the hardscrabble life of tea farmers" (329). Encouraged by this

professor's provocative questions and beliefs concerning tea, Haley will further interact with it and gradually come to see it as a vibrant element of "natureculture" rather than merely a botanical research object.

In the last chapter of the novel, "A Pilgrimage to the Place of Origin", Haley recalls her encounter at a tea exposition with the son of Mr. Huang, Sean Wong, whose performance and discourse on tea further display the agentic force of tea and increase Haley's eagerness to search for the origin of herself and her tea cake. After looking around for a while at the tea expo, Haley feels a bit giddy, and she encounters Sean who invites her to sample his Pu'er. The first sip of Pu'er's liquid deeply impresses Haley as she enthuses, "The first sip of liquid blossomed in my mouth – bitterness bubbled away by sweetness" (349). Through Sean's explanation, Haley learns that this special taste is called *huigan*: "the overwhelming effect that this tea has on breath and opening the chest – that for a moment the world went dizzy" (349). Apart from the unique taste of this tea, Sean's behavior in pouring the beverage and his words about tea captivate Haley and make her believe he is a trustworthy connoisseur. Thus, she exhibits her tea cake to him. Rather than persuading Haley to sell her possession for an exorbitant sum, Sean observes the interconnection between Haley and her tea cake as he states: "Just as a person is searching for tea, the tea is searching for the person.... We'll make a pilgrimage to your tea cake's place of origin" (350). Sean's words fully acknowledge the agentic power of things. The tea cake shares equal status with Haley as both are engaged in a quest for their place of origin. Captivated by Sean's tea and his words on her tea cake, Haley determines to search for the origin of herself and her tea cake under the Sean's guidance. As we know, Sean is acquainted with Haley's tea cake and her birthplace. When he was a little boy diagnosed with bone cancer, his father took him to the Spring Well village where Haley's birth grandmother treated him with the yellow threads from the old tea trees and cured his disease.

What's more, the precious gift inherited from Haley's family lines allows her grandmother to recognize who Haley is the moment she sees it. With the guidance of Sean, Haley comes to Nannuo Mountain and meets an old woman who insists on taking Haley alone to the grove after she sees the tea cake. Keeping pace with the old woman, Haley

climbs the mountains and comes to the grove of old tea tree where she recognizes "... the tree that's been the symbol I've dreamed and wondered about my entire life.... I start to feel something. Memories. Although I can't possibly have a single memory of this place. Then, from deep within me, a profound sense of love radiating out to everything around me complemented by reciprocal waves of love coming at me, enveloping me. All that seems impossible too. I'm both perplexed and overwhelmed" (364). Due to the tea cake, Haley finally finds her origin and is reunited with her birth mother and her birth grandma in this grove filled with memory, history and presence. Because of this reunion, Haley gradually resolves her identity dilemma. Finally, she regards herself as "one hundred percent American and one hundred percent Chinese" which is "a new kind of global citizen" who "can be a bridge between two cultures and two countries" in Sean's view (358).

After "intra-acting" with the tea cake in different stages of her life—at bedtime in her childhood, at school in her class presentation, and at university through her academic research on the tea cake—Haley not only changes from a perplexed little girl to an intelligent, independent and outstanding scientific researcher, but also shifts from being a confused, rootless American into a global person. On one hand, the different narrative and written texts produced by the novel's human characters affirm the tea cake's agentic capacities; on the other, tea's narrative power to create configurations of meanings and substances engages humans in a field of co-emerging intra-actions.

Like the talk-story, tea in *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* represent powerful means of articulating cultural identity and transmitting cultural memories. Material beings supplement and even correct fallible human memory. Non-human things become texts inscribing and producing the dynamics of "diffuse" agency and non-linear causality. They stand beside and interact with written texts and oral accounts to assert the issue of identity. This novel revise conventional Western notions of identity as separate and individual, showing instead that humans and non-humans engage in an always-ongoing process of mutual reshaping and redefinition.

REFERENCES

- [1] Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke

- UP, 2007.
- [2] Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke UP, 2010.
- [3] Dunick, Lisa M.S. "The Silencing Effect of Canonicity: Authorship and the Written Word in Amy Tan's Novels." *MELUS*. 31.2 (Summer 2006): 3-20.
- [4] Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- [5] Limpár, Ildikó. "'Speaking The Language of Shooting Stars': Silence in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*." *Reverberations of Silence: Silenced Texts, Sub-Texts and*
- Authors in Literature, Language and Translation*. Eds. Márta Pellérdi and Gabriella Reuss. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013: 147-159.
- [6] Wong, Hiu Wing, "'Talk-stories' in the Fictions of Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan." Diss. U of Warwick, 2006.
- [7] See, Lisa. *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*. Farmington: Scribner, 2017.
- [8] ---. Interview with Zhang Han. *Southern People Weekly Magazine*, 2018. <https://www.nfpeople.com/article/7175>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2024.
- [9] Shang, Biwu. "Towards a Theory of Nonhuman Narrative." *Neohelicon*. 49. 2022: 59-73.

ⁱ See in an article about Lisa See published in *Southern People Weekly Magazine* in January 3rd, 2018.

<https://www.nfpeople.com/article/7175>.